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Work-Family Conflict: The Effect of
Job and Family Involvement

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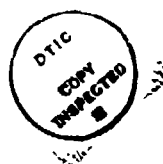
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Abstract

A review of past research revealed inconsistent findings concerning the relationship between job involvement and work-family conflict. This study tested whether family involvement moderates the relationship between job involvement and work-family conflict. Two types of family involvement (spouse and parent) and two types of work-family conflict (job-spouse and job-parent) were assessed. Data were gathered via questionnaire from a sample of nonteaching professionals employed by a large public university in northeastern United States. As hypothesized, job involvement and job-spouse conflict were positively related for individuals high in spouse involvement and unrelated for individuals low in spouse involvement. Contrary to prediction, parental involvement did not moderate the relationship between job involvement and job-parent conflict. Instead, job involvement was positively related to job-parent conflict regardless of the level of parental involvement. Results are discussed in terms of standards for role performance and strength of role demands. Implications for future research are also discussed.



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Work-Family Conflict: The Effect of
Job and Family Involvement

A growing number of social scientists have become interested in the relationship between work and family. This growing concern for both work and family has arisen, in part, from the fact that traditionally rigid life course patterns have become increasingly flexible (Lopata & Norr, 1980). Now, more than ever before, women are more likely to engage in work outside the home and men are more likely to engage in active and demanding family roles. However, this new found freedom to engage in a larger set of social roles (i.e., work and family) may bring with it an increase in the amount of inter-role conflict with which the individual must cope. Hence, of all the topics concerning the work-family interface, work-family conflict is one of the more popular areas of research (cf. Gutek, Larwood, & Stromberg, 1986).

This growing concern with the possibility of increased work-family conflict is not unfounded. Pleck, Staines, and Lang (1980) found that 34% of the respondents in a national survey of U.S. workers reported that their job and family interfered with each other. Furthermore, employed husbands and employed wives were equally likely to report that their job and family life interfered with each other; 34% and 37% respectively (Pleck et al., 1980). In addition to examining the prevalence of work-family conflict, previous research has considered various correlates of work-family conflict, e.g., the life stage of the individual (Hall, 1975), number of social roles (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Hall, 1975; Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977), number of

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hours worked per week (Burke, Weir, & Duwors, 1980; Pleck et al, 1980), and spouse supportiveness (Burke & Weir, 1977; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979a, 1979b) (see Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, for a recent review).

The purpose of the present study was to extend prior research examining the antecedents of work-family conflict. More specifically, this paper examined whether family involvement moderates the relationship between job involvement and perceived work-family conflict. Toward this end, two types of family involvement (spouse and parent) and two types of perceived work-family conflict (job-spouse and job-parent) were assessed.

Inter-role Conflict

Traditional role theorists (e.g., Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Sarbin & Allen, 1968) state that roles are composed of a set of specific behaviors which are expected of a person occupying a particular social position. Therefore, role theorists have defined inter-role conflict as incompatibility between the role expectations of different roles. Following from this traditional definition, work-family conflict occurs when meeting one's family role expectations is perceived to be incompatible with meeting the role demands of one's job, and vice versa.

Role Involvement and Inter-role Conflict

It has been suggested that pressures from work or family roles can increase work-family conflict (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). One source of role pressure is the saliency or centrality of a role for one's self-concept (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The importance of a role for one's self-concept is referred to, in the present study, as role

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involvement. For example, an individual who is highly involved in his or her job views the job as central to his or her self-concept or sense of identity (Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Kanungo, 1982a, 1982b).

Role involvement may increase the likelihood of inter-role conflict in two ways (Bartolome & Evans, 1979; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). First, high levels of involvement in one role may be associated with an increase in the amount of time devoted to that role, thereby making it more difficult to comply with the expectations associated with a second role. In addition, high role involvement may cause one to be mentally preoccupied with one role even when one is physically attempting to fulfill the demands of a second role.

Based on the reasoning presented above, there have been several studies examining the relationship between work involvement (salience) and work-family conflict. These studies have provided inconsistent results, however. For example, Greenhaus and Kopelman (1981) found that, for a sample of men, work role salience was significantly and positively related to work-family conflict. Similarly, Beutell (1983) found that work role salience and work-nonwork conflict were positively related for men, but negatively related for women.

Two additional studies by Holahan and Gilbert (1979a, 1979b) yielded different results. In one of their studies, Holahan and Gilbert (1979a) hypothesized that women who perceived their employment as a career would experience greater work-family conflict than women who perceived their employment as a job. They speculated that the higher degree of work-family conflict for the

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career group would be due to the greater involvement and personal investment of career pursuit. Instead, they found that women in the career group did not report significantly more work-family conflict than women in the job group. In their other study, Holahan and Gilbert (1979b) examined the experience of work-family conflict for a sample of career men and women. They found that, for both men and women, the degree of career commitment was not significantly related to work-family conflict.

This lack of consistent findings concerning the relationship between job involvement and work-family conflict may be attributed to methodological factors such as sampling bias and measurement procedures. However, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) propose that these inconsistent findings may be the result of a conceptual shortcoming, namely a failure to consider unmeasured role pressures in the family domain. For example, if one is highly involved in one's job role, it is unlikely that a high level of perceived work-family conflict will ensue if the individual is not also highly involved in his or her family role. Based on the Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) analysis, it was hypothesized that the relationship between job involvement and work-family conflict would be moderated by the level of involvement in one's family roles. That is, job involvement and work-family conflict would be positively related for individuals high in family involvement and unrelated for individuals low in family involvement.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The subjects were 141 nonteaching professional employees at

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a major public university in the northeastern United States. All subjects were members of the University Professional Staff Senate, the organization through which this survey was conducted.

Each member of the sample was mailed a copy of the questionnaire. Accompanying the questionnaire was a cover letter which described the purpose of the survey, assured anonymity of all responses, and gave instructions for returning the completed questionnaire. One week before the survey was mailed, staff members received a letter from the Professional Staff Senate leadership which described the study and encouraged participation. One week after the questionnaire return deadline, staff members received another letter and copy of the questionnaire. This letter thanked those professional staff who had returned the survey and encouraged participation from staff members who had not yet returned their questionnaire.

The demographic characteristics of the present sample were as follows: 57% were male, 64% were married, and 53% were parents. The average age of the respondents was 41 years ($SD = 10.67$). Also, the subjects worked an average of 44 hours ($SD = 8.17$) per week (including work at home) and were employed by the university for an average of 9 years ($SD = 6.31$). Finally, it should be noted that single respondents without children were excluded from the analyses reported below since data on family involvement was not available.

Measures

Job involvement. The four items in this index were taken from Kanungo's (1982a, 1982b) job involvement scale. The items were: "The most important things that happen to me involve my

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present job role"; "Most of my interests are centered around my job"; "I am very much involved in my job role"; and "To me, my job is only a small part of who I am" (reverse scored). Each item utilized a four-point response format ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Family involvement. Items from the job involvement scale were modified to yield separate measures of involvement in both the spouse and parental roles. The four items in the spouse involvement index were as follows: "The most important things that happen to me involve my role as a spouse"; "Most of my interests are centered around my spouse"; "I am very much involved in my role as a spouse"; and "To me, my spouse role is only a small part of who I am" (reverse scored). Similarly worded items made reference to children and the parental role in the parental involvement scale. Each item in both the spouse and parent involvement scales used the four response alternatives listed previously for job involvement.

Work-family conflict. Separate four-item scales developed by Holahan & Gilbert (1979a, 1979b) were used to measure inter-role conflict between: (1) job and parent roles, and (2) job and spouse roles. The items comprising the scales described a situation with potential for inter-role conflict. Respondents were required to indicate how much internal conflict each situation posed for them. The situations for job-parent conflict were "Supporting your child's recreational activities versus spending time on your own career development"; "Spending most evenings on work related activities versus spending most evenings with your family"; "Your child's requesting that you stay home

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with him or her versus your following the routine of your usual work schedule"; and "Devoting a large percentage of your time to the raising of your family versus devoting a large percentage of your time to work."

The situations for job-spouse conflict were "Putting yourself first in terms of work versus your spouse putting himself/herself first in terms of his/her work"; "Feeling it is more important for your spouse to succeed versus feeling it is more important for you to succeed in your work"; "Wanting to devote time to your work versus your spouse wanting you to spend time with him/her"; and "Wanting to be a 'good' spouse versus being unwilling to risk taking the time from your work." Each item utilized a five-point response format ranging from "causes no internal conflict" to "causes high internal conflict."

Analysis

The hypothesized interaction between job involvement and family involvement in determining work-family conflict was tested with moderated regression analysis. The critical test in moderated regression is the increment in R^2 when an interaction term(s) is added to a regression equation already containing the main effect(s) (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Zedeck, 1971). If the increment in R^2 due to the addition of the interaction term is significant, this is evidence for an interaction (moderator) effect.

Results

Initial analyses revealed no significant effects for the gender of the subject. Sex of subject was unrelated to involvement scores, work-family conflict scores, and neither did

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it significantly affect the magnitude of the interrelationships reported below. The data for men and women were therefore combined in the following analyses.

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations among all predictor and criterion variables. Two results in this table are particularly noteworthy. First, the two conflict measures were positively related. This correlation ($r = .53$) is low enough, however, to suggest that two different types of conflict were in fact being assessed. Second, one can see that job, spouse, and parental involvement scores were significantly intercorrelated. The pattern of correlations revealed that within-domain involvements (i.e., parent and spouse) were positively related, while cross-domain involvements (i.e., job and spouse, job and parent) were negatively related.

Insert Table 1 about here

Moderated Regression Results

Table 2 presents the results of the moderated regression analyses. As hypothesized, the job involvement by spouse involvement interaction led to a significant increment in R^2 for job-spouse conflict. In other words, the magnitude of the correlation between job involvement and job-spouse conflict changes systematically as spouse involvement scores increase. Contrary to prediction, however, the job involvement by parent involvement interaction did not provide a significant increment

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when predicting job-parent conflict. In terms of main effects, job involvement was significantly and positively related only to job-parent conflict; neither spouse involvement nor parental involvement were significantly related to job-spouse or job-parent conflict, respectively.

In order to more fully examine the significant job involvement by spouse involvement interaction, a subgroup correlation analysis was performed. The correlation between job-spouse conflict and job involvement was calculated within high and low spouse involvement subgroups. The assignment of subjects to either the high or low spouse involvement subgroup was based on a median split of the spouse involvement scores. The results of the subgroup analysis revealed that, as hypothesized, job involvement and job-spouse conflict were unrelated ($r = .02$, ns) for low spouse involved subjects and positively related ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) for high spouse involved subjects. The difference between these correlations was statistically significant ($Z = 1.84$, $p < .03$, one-tailed).

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

The present results lend partial support to Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) contention that work-family conflict is the result of role pressure stemming from both job and family domains. The moderated regression and follow-up subgroup analyses indicated that job-spouse conflict was positively related to job involvement among high spouse involved individuals but was

unrelated to job involvement among low spouse involved individuals. These results clearly document the importance of spouse involvement to an understanding of the relationship between job involvement and job-spouse conflict. In contrast, there was no significant job involvement by parent involvement interaction when predicting job-parent conflict. Instead, job involvement was positively related to job-parent conflict regardless of the level of parental involvement. Although the results concerning job-parent conflict were contrary to prediction, two plausible explanations seem worthy of consideration.

The first explanation considers the absolute level of parental role pressures. It seems reasonable to assume that most individuals may be motivated to evaluate themselves favorably as parents regardless of their relative level of parental role involvement. However, to merit positive self-evaluation in the parental role would entail meeting some minimum self-imposed standards concerning the amount of time and psychological investment for parental role performance. The minimum standards held by individuals reporting relatively low levels of involvement in their parental role may be sufficiently high in some absolute sense that they can create enough role pressure to produce inter-role conflict when paired against the demands from a highly involving job.

A second, but related explanation is that the demands of the parental role may simply be more difficult to ignore or escape than other roles. The inability to ignore or escape parent role demands may lead to increased perceptions of job-parent conflict

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as an individual becomes highly involved in a job regardless of one's relative standing on parental involvement. It should be pointed out that these two explanations need not operate independently. Individuals who are relatively low in parental involvement may hold standards for parental role performance that are high in some absolute sense and find it difficult to turn away from parental role demands. In other words, these two factors may combine to create strong pressures to perform well as a parent even among individuals reporting relatively low levels of psychological involvement in their parental role.

The speculation offered above suggests that future research should measure individuals' standards for successful role performance and the ease with which one may ignore or escape role demands. It is important that such information be gathered for multiple roles (e.g., job, spouse, parent) so that comparisons can be made across roles for both high and low role involved individuals. Also, the different moderated regression results reported for job-spouse and job-parent conflict, coupled with the fact that job-spouse and job-parent conflict were only moderately related, suggests that future research should avoid utilizing "generic" family involvement and work-family conflict scales. These generic scales have been utilized extensively in prior research. However, they may hide important antecedents or consequences of role involvements or inter-role conflicts involving the different family roles (e.g., parent, spouse).

Work-Family Role Involvements

While not related to our principal hypothesis, the relationship between job, spouse, and parental involvement merits

brief discussion. Kanungo (1981) identified the need to determine how job involvement relates to involvements in other aspects of one's life (e.g., family). Presumably, such knowledge will help social scientists better understand the motivational processes governing individual efforts to manage the work-nonwork interface. In an independent review of the empirical literature relevant to this issue, Staines (1980) found inconsistent results from studies examining the relationship between work and nonwork involvements. The results of the present study are unique within this literature in that the relationship between within-domain (spouse and parent) and cross-domain (job and spouse, job and parent) involvements could be examined. Our results suggested that within-domain involvements were positively related, while cross-domain involvements were negatively related. Future research should direct more attention to the distinction between cross-domain and within-domain involvement, and the processes which might underlie the current pattern of interrelationships.

In closing, it should be pointed out that given the relatively small sample utilized in this study, the conclusions should be considered tentative. Nevertheless, the present study has taken a critical step forward by examining the interaction between job and family involvement as a determinant of work-family conflict. Future research should attempt to replicate the present findings in order to extend their generalizability to other samples and other measurement procedures. Finally, the utility of the present approach to work-family conflict should be examined within the context of other work-nonwork conflicts (e.g., work-leisure conflict).

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Footnotes

1

More specifically, Beutell's (1983) measure of work-nonwork conflict assessed the degree of interference between work and family/personal interests.

2

An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the results of the moderated regression analyses might plausibly be attributed to the confounding effect of respondent demographic characteristics. However, preliminary analyses examining the correlations between five demographic variables (age, gender, organizational level, organizational tenure, spouse's employment status) and the measures of involvement and work-family conflict revealed only one significant correlation; age and parental involvement correlated $-.26$ ($p < .03$, two-tailed). Hence, it does not seem plausible that the results of the moderated regression analyses could be attributable to some confounding effect of these five background characteristics.

3

While the standardized regression coefficient for the main effect of job involvement on job-spouse conflict was significantly different from zero, Cohen and Cohen (1983) suggest that if the overall R^2 is not significant it is prudent to treat such a coefficient as nonsignificant in order to avoid spuriously significant results.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations
and Reliabilities for Major Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. JIINDEX	(.80)				
2. SIINDEX	-.26	(.76)			
3. PIINDEX	-.19	.30	(.83)		
4. JPCONF	.25	-.07	.03	(.64)	
5. JSCONF	.16	.03	.11	.53	(.62)
<u>M</u>	2.58	2.72	2.76	2.60	2.25
<u>SD</u>	.63	.57	.59	.94	.86
<u>N</u>	140	87	75	67	82

Note. Decimals omitted; Entries on the diagonal are reliability estimates (Coefficient Alpha); Due to missing data, the correlations were based on a sample size ranging from 56 to 87; JIINDEX, Job Involvement index; SIINDEX, Spouse Involvement Index; PIINDEX, Parent Involvement Index; JPCONF, Job-Parent Conflict; JSCONF, Job-Spouse Conflict.

* ** ***
p<.10; p<.05; p<.01; All significance tests were two-tailed.

Table 2
Results of Moderated Regressions

Step	Predictor	Beta ^a	R ²	Change in R ²
Dependent Variable = Job-Spouse Conflict (N = 76)				
1	JIINDEX (1)	.25		
	SIINDEX (2)	.10	.05	
2	1 X 2	1.02	.10	.05
Dependent Variable = Job-Parent Conflict (N = 63)				
1	JIINDEX (1)	.32		
	PIINDEX (2)	.11	.10	
2	1 X 2	.50	.10	.00

Note. JIINDEX, Job Involvement Index; SIINDEX, Spouse Involvement Index; PIINDEX, Parent Involvement Index.

^a

The standardized regression coefficients for the main effects were obtained from the Step 1 regression equation which did not include the interaction term, while the the standardized regression coefficients for the interaction terms were taken from the Step 2 regression equation containing the main effects and interaction term.

*

p < .05

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